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ABSTRACT

A survey of 15 paraprofessional training programs which had OEO funding, Bank Street College of Education sponsorship and consultant service, and commitment to an experimental approach to team training of paraprofessionals and professionals was conducted to determine common trends in objectives, personnel, and methods. The fundamental objective of the programs was found to be the development of a team operation in the classroom and the improvement of interpersonal relations between paraprofessionals and professionals. The people selected to be trained were community members, often parents of children in school. Teachers participating in the programs were selected from a group of volunteers. At the beginning of most programs there were more paraprofessional volunteers than teacher volunteers, but after a period of successful operation, these balances were reversed. Training activities usually consisted of team training for paraprofessionals and teachers, separate skill training for paraprofessionals, and separate leadership training for teachers. Some programs also offered course work for academic credit at cooperating colleges. Such career ladder training for school personnel is expected to undergo a great expansion as a result of funding now available through the EPDA. (RT)

ANALYSIS OF DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMS FOR TRAINING PARAPROFESSIONALS IN EDUCATION

By Garda W. Bowman

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At the outset I shall not attempt to analyze actual programs, either individually or collectively. Rather, I shall try to analyze our own system of analysis in the Study of Auxiliary Personnel -- or Paraprofessionals -- conducted by Bank Street College of Education for the Office of Economic Opportunity from 1966 through 1968.

The focus of this self inquiry is upon the apparent breakdown of communication regarding the findings of the Study, which was revealed at a recent Staff Development Institute for training directors who were sincerely committed to implementing what they conceived to be the "Bank Street Approach" to the training and utilization of paraprofessionals in education.

I had considered giving you a direct exposure to my tapes by holding my small recorder up to this microphone, but I shuddered at the thought that we have reached a point where machines begin talking to machines, so I shall read you the relevant comments.

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REACTIONS OF TRAINING DIRECTORS TO PARAPROFESSIONALS

Said one participant in the recent Staff Development Institute:

> "We find that paraprofessionals are frightened, in fact overwhelmed, when we treat teachers and their assistants as co-equals, with exactly the same responsibilities and functions."

Said another:

> "We require that paraprofessionals attend all inservice training along with the professionals, but the assistants, and particularly the aides, tell us that they are often bored because they don't fully understand what is going on."

Still another participant stated:

> "We in the school system have nothing to do with the selection of paraprofessionals, not even with setting up criteria for selection in terms of the learnings of children. The Community Advisory Committee makes all these decisions on the basis of the economic situation of the job applicant."

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POSSIBLE CAUSAL FACTORS FOR THE OVER-REACTIONS

This seems a vivid illustration of the old cliché: "I can handle my enemies but who will protect me from my friends?" However, the first shock is counteracted by mature reflection.

There appears to be a tendency to overstress that which is most innovative, and over-compensate for that which is most difficult to implement. Perspective is lost. The relation of the single, rather dramatic objective to the totality of the educational goals becomes blurred. A mystique develops which ignores basic realities. Generalized recommendations are then applied indiscriminately without regard to the specific needs and available resources in each school system. Such a development may stem, in part, from the enthusiasm of the implementers, but may also be a function of the analysis itself -- perhaps an overemphasis upon those aspects of the program which require drastic changes in attitude and practice, such as meaningful tasks for paraprofessionals, team training and community involvement. If so, let us be clear as to the ultimate goal as well as the process as we analyze the demonstration programs together.

THE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMS[1]

The 15 demonstration programs studied by Gordon Klopf and me with many colleagues covered a broad range both geographically and in the ethnic characteristics of the paraprofessional trainees, but the programs had in common three elements: 1) O.E.O. funding, 2) Bank Street sponsorship and consultant service, and 3) commitment to an experiential approach to the training of paraprofessionals and professionals with whom they worked, based upon goals which the directors had helped to formulate.

The project directors continued to meet frequently with staff of the Study to analyze the impact of the program in terms of these agreed upon goals and to reorganize their programs, if indicated. From this process some central themes developed and infinite variations. This was essentially a developmental study, not experimental research. The project directors participated in drawing up the specific resolutions which they believed were generalizeable. A brief summary follows of the WHY, WHO, FOR WHAT and HOW of the training.

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1 Bowman, Garda W., and Gordon J. Klopf, New Careers and Roles in the American School. New York: Bank Street College of Education, 1968.

1. Why the Training

The fundamental purpose of the demonstration programs was to develop a team operation for professionals and paraprofrssionals within which they could be more effective in enabling children and youth to learn. Such a team operation required that persons with a wide range of training, experience and background work together with respect for each other and opportunity for each to contribute at the level of his present competencies. This approach subsumes that every member of the team would see himself as a learner, in perpetuum, and that the scope of his activities would increase in consonance with his evolving competence. The opportunity for those with untapped potential to grow on the job is a sub-goal which is important, in and of itself, and also as one aspect of enabling children to learn.

2. Who Was Trained

It was assumed that paraprofessionals would be selected from the community served by the schools, so as to strengthen home-school-child interaction. In low income areas, where the need is greatest and the funding most available, participation by persons from the immediate neighborhood was seen to have many advantages: a) helping the child adjust to the unfamiliar world of the school, b) providing a realizeable role model for him, c) developing persons who can provide two-way communication: interpreting the schools' educational goals to the community and the community's needs and concerns to the school, all to the end that the child's in-school learning will be a strategic supplement to his out-of-school learning.

No one was selected simply because he was poor, but rather poor people were interviewed in depth so as to search out that subtle quality -- the ability to relate constructively to children and youth. Some mistakes were made, as they have been with teachers, but probationary periods were established, wherever possible, with lateral transfer to more appropriate work, where indicated.

Teachers and other professionals were given an opportunity to volunteer for the program, rather than having paraprofessionals thrust upon them before they were ready to use such assistance effectively.

In some instances there were more teachers who were interested in joining the program than there were paraprofessionals to team with them, as in the Two Bridges area in the Lower East Side of New York City. There the community representatives on the Policy Committee participated in setting up the criteria for teacher selection and reacted to the teacher applicants in terms of these criteria. The fact that there was an equal proportion of school people and community representatives on the committee appeared to reduce hostility, since both groups spoke from strength, not weakness. In the end there was a tendency to "give a bit" on both sides rather than rigid adherence to a stand once taken.

When there were more paraprofessionals than teacher volunteers initially, as in Detroit, a pool of assistants was organized to be available on call. As word got around in the teacher's lounge about the advantages of having a team operation, the situation was soon reversed and there were more teacher volunteers than paraprofessionals to be assigned.

In almost every program, the thrust was to train both professionals and paraprofessionals, sometimes together and sometimes separately. In the few programs where team training was not administratively feasible, its absence was deplored. The "how" of the team training programs is considered under a subsequent section of this paper.

3. For What Roles Were They Trained

The role of the paraprofessionals was seen by the directors of the demonstration programs as two-fold:

a) Relieving the teacher of many time-consuming, routine duties and thus freeing him to teach, and

b) Working directly with children under the teacher's supervision, helping them to study, to play, to inquire, to think, to talk, in short -- to learn.

The role of the teacher was viewed as expanded and highly magnified by the addition of leadership and management responsibilities to his continuing and essential interaction with students. The teacher was still responsible for the diagnosis of learning needs and accountable for creating the learning environment and constantly re-structuring it on the basis of its relevance and productivity.

Specific functions varied, depending upon the particularized needs to be filled, the current competencies of each member of the team, and the apparent capacity for growth through training and experience.

An example of flexibility in the assignment of functions may be gleaned from the Washington, D.C. program, where the general recommendations to teachers encouraged using the high school seniors assigned to them as aides in supervising the recreation period, but discouraged using these same aides as home visitors. However, one teacher observed the kind of rapport her aide had established with the children and their parents and decided that he would be an effective home visitor, as, in fact, he turned out to be. On the other hand he had established such a "buddy-buddy" relationship with the students that he had difficulty monitoring the playground -- so she reversed the usual functions.

4. How Were They Trained

Individual variations were most apparent in regard to the HOW. All variations were checked against the agreed upon goals and included only if they seemed to contribute to the enactment of those goals.

There was more commonality in the content areas covered than in the processes employed. In general the WHAT of the training programs was differentiated for the various groups of trainees in the following manner:

a) For Auxiliaries

The content areas which are particularly necessary for the auxiliaries in their separate sessions fall into major categories:

-- The foundations of the social sciences, with particular reference to child development and man in society

-- The school as a social institution: its goals, structure, policies, and relationships within the school as well as between school and community

-- Observational and listening skills: the cues, verbal and non-verbal, which indicate the individual learning needs of children and youth

-- Pedagogical techniques in such areas as reading, math, science, social studies and the arts

-- Mechanical skills, such as the operation of office machines and record keeping

-- Basic education: communication skills such as reading, writing and speaking, when needed

-- Career development: the requirements of the world of work and the possibilities for advancement in the school and other human services

b) For Teachers

The expanded role of the teacher-leader needs to be considered -- i.e. one who not only interacts with students but also orchestrates all the resources, human and material, to meet the learning needs of individual children. This new role places emphasis upon diagnosis and prescription as well as leadership functions.

c) For Teachers and Auxiliaries Together

The mutual understanding and acceptance which are so critical in the development of new roles and relationships require the honest expression of feelings in an open atmosphere. Small interaction groups have proved valuable in establishing rapport between those who differ not only in competencies but in life experiences. More task-oriented than sensitivity training, such interaction groups encourage a process of objective analysis of actual experience, followed by further experimentation and continuing analysis, as goals are clarified and effective procedures are developed mutually.

The process cannot be illustrated by a typical program, since there was, in fact, no typical program. However, time permits the description of only one so I have selected Berkeley, California, because there was an interesting balance of team training and separate training for teachers and paraprofessionals in the four components of their inservice program. After a brief period of orientation, the aides -- all of whom were parents of children in the schools where they worked -- and the teachers met every Tuesday afternoon in small "interaction groups" to discuss what was happening in the classroom, to resolve any role conflicts that might exist, and to plan together. There were stipends for attendance at these after-school sessions. A second component was special skill training for the aides alone on released time during the work day. A third component was leadership training for the teachers who chaired the small group discussions on Tuesday afternoons. The fourth component was course work for academic credit at Merritt Junior College. Those who wished to work for an A.A. degree were given released time for their studies, but at that time -- 1967 -- there was no line item in the budget for educational assistant and no increased responsibility for those who did earn an A.A. degree.

THE OUTCOME

Essentially, this was a descriptive analysis of a group of related case studies. Hence no definitive answers were sought. However, analysis of the data, which had been gathered from written questionnaires, interviews and periodic observations, revealed some central tendencies which appeared to support three of the five premises on which the Study was based. The premises which were generally supported by the data were:

1. That the involvement of persons with a wide range of skills, training, experience, background and potential may provide a better learning environment than the assignment of all educational tasks in a classroom to one person, who, alone, must attempt to meet the individual needs of many students.

2. That participation in the learning-teaching process of persons from the neighborhood served by the school, particularly parents, may increase home-school-child interaction.

3. That broad community involvement in planning educational programs may contribute materially to the social relevance of such planning -- relevance to the needs, interests and real concerns of the school population.

The other two premises which dealt with career development for paraprofessionals and professionals were not refuted in principle by the data but neither were they seen to be strongly supported by practice, because in 1967 the concept of a career ladder below or above the professional level was more a pleasant fantasy than an accomplished fact in most school systems, including those studied.

However, the situation in 1970 is dramatically altered. Not only has the New Careers Movement had more implementation and hence more understanding, but also there has been a surge of activity by unions, professional associations and by the paraprofessionals, themselves, through their own organizations. Perhaps the most important influence is a new source of funding for Career Opportunity Programs under the Education Professions Development Act. More than a hundred school systems throughout the country -- at least two in each state -- will be able to develop a career ladder with training available on a work study basis in a cooperating college or university for each step in the ladder from aide to assistant to associate to intern to certified teacher. A progress report on paraprofessionals in 1971 should be drastically different from my report to you.

THE FILM: TEAMS FOR LEARNING

Progress is depicted more vividly in a shared experience than in a report, no matter what the content. The documentary film you are about to see has caught on camera some real people working together as teams in various school settings. We earnestly seek your reactions to the film, either in the form of questions or comments. They will help to deepen the continuing analysis in which we all need to participate if we are to learn how adults work together in order that children and youth may learn.

One final point: what you will see in the film is the end product of training, i.e. team interaction, but in each of the four programs depicted there had been and was continuing training, both formal and informal. One principle derived inductively from the data and confirmed by subsequent experience is that the benefits we seek from the use of paraprofessionals do not come about automatically. Training is the essential to effective utilization of these new colleagues in education.